



**U.S. Army Research Institute  
for the Behavioral and Social Sciences**

**Research Report 1760**

**Factors Affecting the Career Decisions of  
Army Captains**

**Michael D. Matthews and John R. Hyatt  
U.S. Army Research Institute**

**June 2000**

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**U.S. Army Research Institute  
for the Behavioral and Social Sciences**

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**EDGAR M. JOHNSON  
Director**

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Technical review by

Jean Dyer, U.S. Army Research Institute  
LTC Lenny Wong, Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis, USMA  
Alma Steinberg, U.S. Army Research Institute  
LTC Mark Onesi, U.S. Army Research Institute

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## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. REPORT DATE (dd-mm-yy) June 2000			2. REPORT TYPE Final			3. DATES COVERED (from... to) June 1999 to December 1999		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Factors Affecting the Career Decisions of Army Captains						5a. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER		
						5b. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER 62785		
6. AUTHOR(S)  Michael D. Matthews and John R. Hyatt						5c. PROJECT NUMBER A790		
						5d. TASK NUMBER N/A		
						5e. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences Infantry Forces Research Unit, ATTN: TAPC-ARI-IJ P.O. Box 52086 Fort Benning, GA 31995-2086						8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences 5001 Eisenhower Avenue Alexandria, VA 22333-5600						10. MONITOR ACRONYM ARI		
						11. MONITOR REPORT NUMBER Research Report 1760		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.								
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES								
14. ABSTRACT ( <i>Maximum 200 words</i> ): Army captains were interviewed to determine factors that affect their career-decisions. Seventeen Fort Benning captains who had submitted their paperwork to separate from the Army ("leavers"), 15 Fort Benning captains who planned to remain in the Army ("stayers"), and 15 captains from four Infantry posts who had separated from the Army but had recently returned to active duty ("returners") were interviewed. Because the majority of those interviewed were assigned to Fort Benning, the generality of the results to the Army as a whole are limited. However, job dissatisfaction/frustration, family issues, and the perception of strong civilian job opportunities were the main reasons captains left. Pay and benefits were not among the top factors mentioned. Leavers also were less satisfied with their degree of intrinsic job satisfaction and chances for advancement than stayers or returners. Stayers and returners valued the intrinsic qualities of Army work and life. Suggestions for improving captain retention include earlier and more meaningful mentoring of junior officers, giving officers more control in the job assignment process, and better management of operational tempo (OPTEMPO).								
15. SUBJECT TERMS Captain Attrition Job Satisfaction Family Issues Leadership Organizational Development Operational Tempo (OPTEMPO)								
SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF						19. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	20. NUMBER OF PAGES	21. RESPONSIBLE (Name and Telephone Number) Dr. Michael D. Matthews 706-545-2198
16. REPORT Unclassified	17. ABSTRACT Unclassified	18. THIS PAGE Unclassified	Unlimited					

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# **Factors Affecting the Career Decisions of Army Captains**

**Michael D. Matthews and John R. Hyatt**  
U.S. Army Research Institute

**Infantry Forces Research Unit**  
**Scott E. Graham, Chief**

**U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences**  
**5001 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22333-5600**

**June 2000**

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**Army Project Number**  
**20262785A790**

**Personnel Performance and  
Training Technology**

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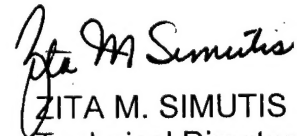
## FOREWORD

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The Army is experiencing a shortage of captains. This report describes the results of an evaluation of factors that influence a captain's decision to remain in or leave the Army. The research was undertaken at the request of the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Infantry School. The research focused on why captains were separating from the Army and whether Fort Benning captains were leaving for reasons similar to captains elsewhere in the Army.

The sample included captains who had submitted their paperwork for separating from the Army, captains who currently plan to remain in the Army, and captains who returned to active duty after separating from the Army at the end of their initial duty obligation. The three groups had different perspectives on key Army issues including their Army job, family matters, and the attractiveness of the civilian economy. Although the majority of the captains interviewed were assigned to Fort Benning thus limiting the generality of the findings, these in-depth interviews serve as a useful comparison point to the large-scale survey data that the Army regularly collects on career intent.

The findings were briefed to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army Infantry School and the Commander, U.S. Army Ranger Training Brigade in October 1999. The Commander of the U.S. Army Infantry Training Brigade was briefed in December 1999.

  
ZITA M. SIMUTIS  
Technical Director

# FACTORS AFFECTING THE CAREER DECISIONS OF ARMY CAPTAINS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Research Requirement:

The research was in response to a request from the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Infantry School to examine captain losses at Fort Benning, Georgia. Specifically, the research focused on why captains at Fort Benning were leaving the Army, if their reasons were similar to those given by captains elsewhere in the Army, and if there were any factors unique to Fort Benning contributing to captain losses there.

### Procedure:

Structured interviews were conducted with three groups of captains. The first group, "leavers," included 17 Fort Benning captains who had submitted the paperwork to separate from the Army. The second group, "stayers," was composed of 15 Fort Benning captains who currently planned on remaining in the Army. The third group, "returners," consisted of 15 captains who had returned to active duty following a period of separation from the Army. Eight of the returners were assigned to Fort Benning and seven were assigned to one of three Infantry posts other than Fort Benning. A combination of scaled and open-ended questions dealing with factors affecting their career decisions, job satisfaction, and job commitment was presented.

### Findings:

The generality of the findings is limited because all of the leavers and stayers, and the majority of the returners, were assigned to Fort Benning. Leavers provided three broad categories of reasons for separating from the Army. These were job frustration and dissatisfaction, concern or conflict with family issues, and the allure of a robust civilian economy. Strong intrinsic satisfaction with their work kept stayers in the Army. Returners reported unpleasant experiences with civilian jobs, and returned to the Army because they enjoyed Army work, mission, and life. Pay and benefits were seldom mentioned as a reason to leave. The participants judged the quality of captains leaving the Army to be high.

### Utilization of Findings:

The results have implications for dealing with the Army-wide captain shortage. Suggestions for improving captain retention include giving officers increased control in career-management and improved mentoring of junior officers.

# FACTORS AFFECTING THE CAREER DECISIONS OF ARMY CAPTAINS

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## **Factors Affecting the Career Decisions of Army Captains**

### **Introduction**

The U.S. Army is experiencing a shortage of captains. According to Cornwall (1999), the Army can fill only 84% of all competitive captain requirements and just 61% of branch-qualified needs. The shortage is occurring in the broader context of a force that has been reduced 35% since 1990 but has seen a 300% increase in operational deployments since that time (Segal, Rohall, Jones, & Manos, 1999). In response to the problem, the Army has developed programs to allow captains who separated the Army to return to active duty, to selectively continue on active duty captains who have been twice passed over for major, and shortened promotion time to captain from 48 to 42 months (Tice, 2000).

The captain shortage is exacerbated by an increased rate of captain losses due to voluntary separations. Captain losses prior to promotion to major in fiscal year 1998 were 9.25%, compared to 6.90% and 7.86% for fiscal years 1996 and 1997, respectively (Office of Economic & Manpower Analysis [OEMA], 1999). Moreover, there are indications that even greater numbers of captains may soon leave the Army. In the spring of 1999, 35% of captains surveyed indicated they intended to separate from the Army at the end of their current duty obligation, up from 29% a year earlier (Army Personnel Survey Office, 1999).

There are several reasons that captain losses are on the rise. One factor may be a substantial increase in operations tempo (OPTEMPO). Castro and Adler (1999), for example, point out that while the number of Army personnel assigned in Europe has declined from 213,000 in 1990 to 62,000 in 1999, the number of military deployments in Europe has risen dramatically. From 1945 to 1989, Europe-based Army forces participated in 29 peacekeeping or humanitarian missions. Since 1991, however, these forces have been involved in over 100 missions of this type. In addition, the percent of military personnel assigned away from home due to deployments or training in fiscal year 1998 was 60% higher than 10 years earlier (General Accounting Office [GAO], 1999), despite the substantial decrease in number of military personnel in the same period. It is expected that the Army will continue to be involved in such missions at a high rate. Current Army members may expect to be deployed away from home and family more often than in the past. This, in turn, has been related to decreasing job and career satisfaction among company grade officers (U.S. Army Research Institute [ARI], 1999), and may affect career intent.

High OPTEMPO has collateral effects that may affect career intent. Besides increased time away from the family, high OPTEMPO coupled with the greatly reduced numbers of Army personnel results in many officers and enlisted soldiers working extremely long hours and weekends or other times when they traditionally had time away from their duties. In turn, these factors may lead to job burnout and further weaken the desire to remain in the Army. Long hours and separation from the family may enhance the valence of the civilian sector. Survey data indicate that increasing

numbers of company grade officers perceive better opportunities in the civilian sector for pay, total family income, retirement benefits, overall standard of living, and overall quality of life (ARI, 1999).

The GAO (1999) recently polled 986 active duty service members about their jobs and career intent. The results showed nine factors that adversely affected the overall quality of life for officers. These were unavailability of equipment and parts, medical care for dependents, level of unit manning, retirement pay, access to medical care during retirement, frequency of deployments, quality of civilian and military leaders, time available for family and friends, and amount of personal time. The five most frequent reasons given for leaving the military for officers were retirement pay, frequency of deployments, base pay, unavailability of equipment and parts, and level of unit manning. Interestingly, a greater percentage of Army officers (53%) indicated they intended to leave the service than Navy (33%), Air Force (31%), or Marines (44%). It should be noted that the results of this study may not generalize to the Army or military as a whole, because only personnel assigned to jobs thought to be experiencing retention problems were included in the sample.

In view of the captain shortage it is important to retain as many captains as possible. To do this, the reasons captains are leaving must be thoroughly understood. Although officer career intent is regularly assessed by ARI through Army-wide surveys, occasionally it is useful to conduct more detailed personal interviews with officers who are leaving the Army. The interview technique allows researchers to probe in more depth on individual's reasons for leaving the Army. For example, Steinberg, Harris, and Scarville (1993) interviewed 30 women captains who had made the list for promotion to major, but who opted to leave the Army instead. The interview procedure allowed Steinberg et al. to conclude that the decision to leave the Army was affected by many interrelated factors, and typically no single reason resulted in the decision to leave.

The impetus to conduct the current study came from the U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS). Three factors were addressed in the research design. These were the perceived quality of captains at Fort Benning leaving the Army, reasons for leaving and if those reasons were similar to those of Infantry captains assigned elsewhere in the Army, and if there were any factors uniquely associated with Fort Benning that were affecting captain losses there. Detailed interviews were conducted with Fort Benning captains who had initiated the process of separation from the Army. In addition, Fort Benning captains remaining in the Army and a group of captains returning to the Army after a period of separation from active duty were interviewed. The Army-wide captain retention issues provided broad relevance for the study.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

A list of captains who had submitted paperwork for separation from the Army was obtained from the Fort Benning personnel office. From this list, 17 captains were

identified who were still on active duty. All 17 of these "leavers" agreed to be interviewed. The unit in which each leaver was assigned provided the name of a captain with comparable time in rank and experience who was planning on remaining in the Army. Fifteen "stayers" were thus identified and each agreed to be interviewed. All leavers and stayers were assigned to Fort Benning. In addition, a list of captains who had returned to active duty after separating from the Army or from service in the Army National Guard was obtained from Department of Army Headquarters. Eight of the captains on this list were assigned to Fort Benning and agreed to a face-to-face interview. Seven other captains in combat arms specialties were located at Fort Knox (n=4), Fort Bliss (n=2), and Fort Hood (n=1). They agreed to telephone interviews. Thus, 15 "returners" were included in the study. Among the 15 returners, four had entered active duty from the ARNG. The remainder entered after separating from the Army in a previous active duty obligation.

Leavers, stayers, and returners were similar in years of commissioned service, branch, marital status, and branch-qualification. All were male. Stayers and returners were somewhat more likely to have had prior enlisted service. Those with prior service averaged 3.5 years of enlisted service. More leavers were U.S. Military Academy (USMA) graduates. Table 1 summarizes leaver, stayer, and returner characteristics.

Table 1  
*Background Characteristics of Sample*

Characteristic	Leavers (n=17)	Stayers (n=15)	Returners (n=15)
Commissioned Service	5.4 years	5.6 years	5.7 years
Branch			
Infantry	11	9	7
Armor	2	1	4
Quartermaster	1	0	0
Transportation	1	1	0
Ordnance	1	2	0
Aviation	1	0	0
Chemical	0	1	0
Military Intelligence	0	1	0
ADA	0	0	2
FA	0	0	1
SF	0	0	1
Prior enlisted service	1	4	3
Married	12	11	14
Branch-Qualified	6	5	5
Commissioning Source			
USMA	12	2	0
ROTC	5	11	12
OCS	0	3	3

## *Materials and Procedure*

The interview forms used are in Appendix A. Questions were modeled after Steinberg et al (1993), the General Social Surveys (Davis & Smith, 1990), and two surveys regularly conducted by ARI – the Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP), and the Survey on Officer Careers (SOC). Each form included demographic and background questions. All respondents were asked about their career intent at the time of commissioning. They also rated how difficult it would be to find a civilian job equal to or better than their Army job. Based on a question included in the General Social Survey, officers in each group rank ordered from most to least importance the following job characteristics: high pay; work that is important and meaningful; chances for advancement; flexible working hours; and job security. All respondents then rated, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied," their satisfaction with their Army job on each of the same five job components.

All respondents were also questioned about the role that family issues played in their career intent, and what the Army could do (stayers and returners) or could have done (leavers) to make them more likely to stay. Stayers and returners indicated how confident they felt about being allowed to stay in the Army until retirement, and leavers estimated their confidence on being able to stay until retirement had they not chosen to separate. All respondents also rated the quality of captains who are leaving the Army.

Questions specific to leavers included the primary reason they decided to leave the Army and other influences that led to the decision to separate. They were asked when they first started thinking about leaving the Army, and the reason they began thinking of leaving. Leavers were questioned about when and why they made their final decision to leave. They were asked if they had a civilian job waiting for them and, if they did, what it was. Finally, leavers were asked if they felt their decision to leave was more "pull" (perception of a better deal outside the Army) or "push" (job dissatisfaction, family disruption, OPTEMPO, etc.).

Questions specific to stayers included what factors made them remain in the Army, what made them think of leaving, and whether they planned to make the Army a career. Returners were questioned about why they left the Army, their civilian job experiences, and why they chose to return to active duty. They also stated their current career intent.

The participants were told that their responses would be confidential. The interviews took about 30 minutes. To ensure accuracy, the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

## Results

### *Why Leave the Army?*

The primary reason each leaver gave for separating from the Army was examined. These reasons were grouped into three general categories. These categories were job frustration or dissatisfaction (mentioned by 35% of leavers as their primary reason for leaving), family issues (35%), and attractiveness of the civilian economy (29%). Most leavers mentioned several reasons for separating. Appendix A includes all reasons given by each leaver, organized under the three categories just mentioned. The average number of reasons given for separating from the Army per leaver was 4.7, with a range of 1 to 9. Of a total of 80 reasons given, 65% dealt with job or career dissatisfaction, 24% with family issues, and 11% with civilian opportunities.

In the area of job or career dissatisfaction, the most frequently given reasons were high OPTEMPO (mentioned by 10 leavers), poor leadership (7), lack of control in obtaining assignments (7), excessive micromanagement (6), and limited or slow promotion opportunities (5). The most frequently mentioned reasons under family issues were time away from the family (7), the importance of the wife's career (5), the perception that having a family and Army life were incompatible (3), and moving is disruptive (3).

Five leavers mentioned they were separating to seek employment in an area of long-term interest. For example, one felt "called by God" to found a youth ministry. Another had secured a fellowship to study for a doctorate degree in engineering, and one had been admitted to medical school. Three made general statements about the civilian economy being particularly attractive at this time, and one felt there was simply a better quality of life in the civilian sector in terms of stability of job and working conditions. Altogether, 58% of leavers "definitely" or "probably" had a civilian job arranged at the time of their interview. Table 2 presents selected comments by leavers.

There was at least a 12-month interval between initially thinking of leaving the Army and making the final decision to leave for the majority (75%) of leavers. Forty-one percent thought about leaving for over two years before making the final decision to leave. Table 3 shows the reasons leavers gave for initially thinking of leaving and those at the time the final decision to leave was made. The biggest change is a somewhat increased role of civilian opportunities at the time of the final decision. Perhaps leavers were waiting for an optimal time to make their career move.

Leavers appeared confident they would be able to pursue a full 20-year career in the Army if they had chosen to do so. Sixteen leavers indicated they "definitely" would be allowed to stay until retirement, and one stated he "probably" would be able to have done so. Stayers and returners were also very confident of being able to remain in the Army until retirement, with 93% of each group saying they "definitely" would be allowed to stay in until retirement.

Table 2

*Comments of Leavers on Reasons for Separating from the Army*

**Army Job/Career Factors**

"I've been pushed to the limit on reassignments and deployments. OPTEMPO is too high."

"I do not enjoy peacekeeping missions. When I was in Germany, we did zero warfighting training."

"You don't work late into the night training or working with soldiers. Instead you work late to prepare a Power Point presentation for your commander."

"Many guys feel a total lack of control in obtaining preferred assignments."

"Not enough money to train, manning is poor, and the quality of training is not battle focused."

**Family Issues**

"I got married recently and my wife doesn't want me to pursue an Army career. I did a tour in Bosnia and she was very upset."

"My wife and I plan to start a family. When we do have children I would like my job to be more stable than the Army."

"My wife's feelings are number one. I want to consider her professional career, and she wants me home for the kids."

"With the types and frequency of deployments, my wife wants more of my presence at home."

**Civilian Opportunities**

"Seems like a good time for me to get out and go back to school."

"To pursue mechanical engineering and earn a doctoral degree."

"I've been proud to serve. I have had a great experience and matured in the service, and have decided to go to medical school."

Table 3

*Initial and Final Factors Involved in Decision to Leave*

<b>Reason to Leave</b>	<b>Initial</b>	<b>Final</b>
Dissatisfaction with Army job/career	65% (n=11)	53% (n=9)
Family issues	18% (n=3)	12% (n=2)
Civilian opportunities	18% (n=3)	35% (n=6)

Only 59% of the leavers "definitely" or "probably" had a civilian job already waiting for them. As a group, they were fairly confident of easily finding a good civilian job. Ninety-four percent of the leavers said it was "probably" or "definitely" easy to find a good civilian job, compared to 62% of stayers and 73% of returners. Of leavers who had a civilian job already arranged, the most common positions were in management, sales, and manufacturing. One was going to work for a "headhunter" helping to recruit other officers to leave the Army for civilian positions ("I am the Army's worst nightmare," in his own words).

Leavers were questioned about what could be done to keep them in the Army. Fifty-three percent said nothing would keep them in. The remaining leavers mentioned the following factors might have influenced them to stay in: greater control in assignments and/or getting a desired assignment (29%), less emphasis on peacekeeping missions (12%), and improved leadership (6%).

One half of leavers stated they felt their leaving the Army was due more to "push" than to "pull" factors. Another 24% stated that "push" and "pull" were equal for them. The remainder (29%) said they felt they were being "pulled" from the Army because of a more favorable civilian job market or quality of life.

#### *Why Stay in the Army?*

The most common reason given by stayers for remaining in the Army were liking their job and/or working with soldiers (62%), enjoyment of Army life (25%), and pay and benefits (6%). Factors that made them think of leaving the Army were similar to those given by leavers, with the most common reason relating to dissatisfaction with Army job/career (69%). Family issues (12%) and civilian opportunities (12%) were also mentioned.

Stayers and returners were quizzed about what could be done to make them more likely to remain in the Army. The most frequent response was more control in assignments, mentioned by 40% and 33% of stayers and returners, respectively. Other factors mentioned by stayers were improved pay and benefits (13%), improved housing and other post resources (13%), fewer peacekeeping missions (7%), define center-mass officer effectiveness report as sufficient for promotion (7%), and "nothing needs to be done" (20%). Among returners, 13% stated better control of OPTEMPO and 17% mentioned improved unit manning. Improved pay and benefits, increased focus on the family, greater focus on soldier issues, easier transition from the ARNG to active duty, and "nothing needs to be done" were each mentioned by 7% of the returners.

#### *Why Return to the Army?*

Eleven of the captains in the returner sample had been commissioned into the active duty Army as second lieutenants, completed their initial duty obligation, then separated from the Army. A majority (60%) listed family issues as their primary reason for separating, and 40% mentioned job or career related frustrations. Three returners

(27%) cited perceived opportunities to make more money or advance more quickly in the civilian sector as a secondary reason for leaving.

The returners were out of the Army for an average of three years, and had been back on active duty an average of eight months at the time of their interviews. Eight were currently enrolled in the Infantry Captain's Career Course. In their civilian jobs, six held management jobs, three were in sales, two were law enforcement officers, one was a self-employed graphic artist, one was a mechanical engineer, and one held a variety of non-professional positions. One additional returner enlisted in the Army as an E-5 the day he resigned his commission. He had been branch-detailed to Infantry as a lieutenant and was to be assigned to another branch upon promotion to captain. However, he wanted to remain Infantry and the Army would not accommodate this. He enlisted in order to remain in the branch of his choice.

The civilian job experiences of the returners were mixed. Most were paid at least as well as their Army position paid. However, all returners were disillusioned about the quality of their civilian work experience. Most of their comments centered on the lack of a sense of shared mission, no esprit de corps, lack of discipline, and low morale of civilian workers. Several mentioned that they underestimated the length of working hours and travel required in civilian jobs. Table 4 presents representative comments of returners on their civilian jobs. They felt that headhunters "oversold" or misrepresented the pay, benefits, and working conditions they found in their civilian jobs.

*Table 4*

*Comments of Returners on Civilian Job Experience*

"Headhunters found me a job where I made 70K as a production foreman. But I still wasn't home very much, and worked seven days a week. The main lesson I learned was that people are expendable in the civilian work force. They can always get somebody else to do the job."

"I sold real estate. I made good money but hated every second of it. No teamwork, coworkers would cut your throat, and they lacked honor and integrity."

"I was a plant manager. Got the job through a headhunter. My expectations were not met. I thought there would be discipline and high morale in my civilian job but there was not. It left a real bad taste in my mouth."

"I worked for an insurance company. The salary was OK, but the job satisfaction was just not there."

"I took a job as a mechanical maintenance supervisor. It was a good job, but when they learned I was a good briefer, I got sent "TDY" all of the time. Two to three days a week was not unusual. I discovered that 75K on the outside isn't any better than I was making in the Army."

The four returners who came to active duty from ARNG were included in the sample because they also had held civilian jobs, were highly motivated to come to active duty, and represent an unknown number of ARNG officers who desire to come to active duty. They too were disenchanted with their civilian job experiences. They enjoyed their ARNG duties more than their civilian jobs, and were simply waiting for an opportunity to come to active duty. As one captain said, "I worked my civilian job to support my ARNG habit."

### *Group Comparisons*

*Career Intent.* Table 5 summarizes the initial career intent of each group of officers. Leavers were significantly less likely than stayers or returners to state that they planned to remain in the Army for a career at the time they were commissioned,  $X^2(2) = 13.83, p < .01$ . No returners stated their initial intent had been to separate at the end of their initial duty obligation.

Table 5  
*Career Intent at Time of Commissioning*

<b><i>Intent</i></b>	<b><i>Leavers</i></b>	<b><i>Stayers</i></b>	<b><i>Returners</i></b>
Career	29%	47%	93%
Undecided	47%	40%	7%
Separate at end of Obligation	24%	13%	0%

Stayers and returners were questioned about their current career intent. Interestingly, only 50% of the stayers indicated they currently planned to "definitely stay" in the Army for at least a 20 year career. Nineteen percent said they "probably" would remain until retirement and another 19% marked they were "not sure." Two stayers (12%) stated they planned to separate from the Army, but not in the immediate future. In contrast, 100% of the returners stated they now plan to stay until retirement. This represented a significant difference in current career intent between stayers and returners,  $t(28) = 3.12, p < .01$ .

*Job Satisfaction and Motivation.* Respondents selected which of five job characteristics they most value in a job. Table 6 presents the distribution of responses for the three groups (no officer selected "flexible working hours" as their top choice, so it is not displayed). The biggest difference between leavers and the other two groups is the relatively lower choice of "important and meaningful work" as the most desired job characteristic. Also, only leavers selected "chances for advancement" as their top choice.

Leavers, stayers, and returners rated their degree of satisfaction on each of the five factors noted in Table 7. A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. An overall group effect was found, Wilks' Lambda,  $F(10) = 3.96, p < .05$ . Table 7 presents results of the MANOVA. Significant differences among the groups were found for chances for advancement, important and meaningful work, and flexible

hours. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference Test revealed the following specific differences. In chances for advancement, both stayers and returners had higher satisfaction than leavers, but did not differ from each other. For important and meaningful work, returners and stayers reported significantly higher satisfaction than leavers, but did not differ between themselves. Returners reported higher satisfaction with their hours than leavers. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in satisfaction with pay or job security among the three groups.

Table 6  
*Top Factor Desired in a Job*

<b>Job Factor</b>	<b>Leavers</b>	<b>Stayers</b>	<b>Returners</b>
Important and Meaningful Work	53%	88%	100%
Chance for Advancement	29%	0%	0%
High Pay	12%	6%	0%
Job Security	6%	6%	0%

Table 7  
*MANOVA Results on Job Satisfaction Items*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>
Chances for Advancement	Leavers	3.12	.99	2,44	9.94**
	Stayers	4.13	.74		
	Returners	4.27	.59		
Important and Meaningful Work	Leavers	3.64	1.06	2,44	8.61**
	Stayers	4.47	.64		
	Returners	4.73	.46		
Flexible Hours	Leavers	2.82	.88	2,44	4.26*
	Stayers	3.00	1.07		
	Returners	3.73	.80		
High Pay	Leavers	3.82	.95	2,44	2.27
	Stayers	3.73	.96		
	Returners	4.33	.49		
Job Security	Leavers	4.35	.49	2,44	.81
	Stayers	4.47	.64		
	Returners	4.60	.51		

$p < .05^*$        $** p < .01$

*Note.* Responses were made on a scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5).

*Role of Family Issues in Career Intent.* Because of the previously documented role of family issues in shaping career-decisions (e.g., ARI, 1999), captains in each of the three groups were questioned directly about the impact of family issues on their career decisions. Not surprisingly, 100% of leavers said that family related problems – either already experienced or anticipated – were a factor in their decision to leave the

Army. Conflicts included excessive time away from the family due to deployments or long working hours, the perception that the Army was not a good environment in which to raise a child, the difficulty for a spouse to pursue or maintain a professional career, and disruptions stemming from frequent permanent change of station (PCS) moves. Among returners, 73% agreed that family issues continue to play a role in career decisions since returning to active duty. In contrast, only 47% of stayers said that family issues were a consideration in their career decisions.

*Quality of Captains Leaving the Army.* The captains in all three groups were asked to judge the quality of captains leaving the Army. Overwhelmingly, they were perceived as being high quality. All of the returners stated it was high quality captains leaving. Ninety-three percent of stayers and 86% of returners made the same assertion. Many were concerned that captains remaining in the Army represented less competitive or motivated individuals, and this in turn suggested negative implications for the future leadership of the Army. Selected comments on the quality of captains leaving the Army are in Table 8.

*Table 8.*

*Comments on Quality of Captains Leaving the Army*

"High quality. We are losing good people, leaving the mediocre to the lower end to ride it out. I have a concern for future leadership."

"The Army is losing quality guys and it is disheartening to see them leave the service."

"I know about 20 who have left. They were quality officers."

"In my personal experience, it has been the top notch guys. Heck, one of the guys that got out is my financial manager."

"The majority of guys in my year group have left the Army. Rarely do you see less than the stellar guys getting out."

"My impression is they are squared away. Less than one in ten was a dud. The Army is losing good men as a whole."

"The best guys are leaving. It is scary to see them get out. Most that got out had families and had experienced high OPTEMPO."

"Good officers are getting out because they are tired of being screwed by the Army's inflexibility in assignments."

*Career Counseling and Mentoring.* When an officer "drops his paperwork" to initiate the separation process, his or her commander is required to counsel him/her on that decision. Fifteen of the leavers said they received the required counseling, but it was given too late to change their minds. However, the leavers were reluctant to discuss career indecision with their superiors prior to making a final decision. Several

officers stated that talking openly about career indecision with commanding officers might result in adverse consequences. "Talking openly with senior officers about leaving would be viewed as treason and my OER would have suffered," one leaver stated. Similarly, one said "I would not have felt comfortable talking with my senior rater – I would have become the bad boy in the battalion from his point of view. When he found out I was separating, he told me I was not living up to my commitments." Another stated his OER was downgraded after talking with his commander about possibly leaving the Army.

Returners reported similar experiences with the required counseling when they initially separated. They were also asked if they had received meaningful mentoring earlier in their careers, while they were still lieutenants. Only three said they had. Their comments suggested that more systematic and genuine mentoring are needed early in officers' careers, and that early experiences with leadership is important in shaping career decisions later on down the line. Selected comments of returners on early career mentoring are in Table 9.

*Table 9.*

*Comments of Returners on Early Career Mentoring*

<p>"One of my four company commanders was good at mentoring. One was horrible – he told me he only cared about getting promoted and that he could care less about soldiers."</p> <p>"No! We need to see much more effective mentoring."</p> <p>"Not really, but I should have. We need to address mentoring – it is a major issue."</p> <p>"I was never mentored by my commanders. It is important to know how you are doing and get guidance on your career. I have also never received an outbrief on my OERs."</p> <p>"No, not really. One battalion commander tried but he didn't really get into it. It was not done very well with me. A lot of senior lieutenants leave the Army because no one mentors them or takes care of them in guiding their careers."</p>
--

*Comparability to Army as a Whole*

One of the original objectives of the research was to determine if the reasons captains at Fort Benning give for leaving the Army are similar to those given by captains elsewhere in the Army. To address this issue, SOC and LROC data files, restricted to Infantry captains only, were analyzed. These analyses showed that Fort Benning captains gave reasons for leaving similar to their counterparts assigned at other installations. Although a full presentation of these analyses is beyond the scope of this report, other studies of captain career-intent using these databases are available (e.g., ARI, 1999; Army Personnel Research Office, 1999).

For the most part, the reasons producing the decision to leave the Army were not affected by any factors unique to Fort Benning. When asked if there were factors specific to Fort Benning that affected the decision to leave, 59% of the leavers said there were none. Those who said there were Fort Benning related reasons mentioned organizational or command climate of specific units, the large number of Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA) jobs present, and the low manning and resourcing of units. No systemic problems unique to Fort Benning were identified.

## Discussion

### *Career Decisions*

Care should be used in generalizing the results of the interviews to the Army as a whole. The captains selected for interviews represented a convenience sample. Most were assigned to Fort Benning and the majority held jobs in combat arms. However, the opinions and attitudes expressed were similar to results obtained in larger, Army-wide surveys of officer opinions (e.g., Army Personnel Survey Office, 1999). In addition, the results represent in-depth analysis of captains who had recently made important career decisions, versus the focus on career-intent found in previous survey research. Thus, the findings may provide useful insights to the problem of captain retention.

The findings show that career intent is based on several interacting factors, and the decision to leave is seldom based on a single overriding issue. Captains who separate from the Army typically do so after a long period of deliberation, and the decision is systematically formed. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the findings is what was *not* found. Army pay, for example, was seldom mentioned as a factor in the decision to leave. In fact, leavers and stayers showed equal satisfaction with pay. Nor was the decision to leave for most captains simply a matter of greater opportunities in the civilian sector. This suggests that increasing the pay of officers is not, in and of itself, sufficient to induce officers to remain in the Army. A recent GAO report reached a similar conclusion (GAO, 1999). However, the power of economic variables should not be discounted. As Wong (L. Wong, personal communication, February 15, 2000) points out, "Although pay did not push captains out of the Army . . . one must not underestimate the power of the economy. If we were in a deep recession, the economy would *push* captains to stay in. They would still complain about the same factors, but they would not leave."

The major influence of family concerns in the decision to leave may reflect changing demographic and attitudinal patterns that differentiate the current cohort of captains from their predecessors. An analysis of captain career decisions was recently completed by OEMA (1999). This analysis pointed out that approximately 90% of current captains belong to the so-called "Generation X." Many Generation X members are children of parents who both held jobs, and 40% of them spent time in a single parent home. Thus, they may have felt deprived of their parents' company. This may be reflected in the strong feelings that the current group of captains had concerning the stability of their families, and of having a consistent presence in the home. They may

be attempting to provide their children with the family support they perceived to be lacking in their own childhood.

Several interviews with leavers began with the captain stating, in response to why he was separating from the Army, "Well, I just got married a few months ago and . . . ." The leavers seemed very concerned about their spouses' opinion of an Army career. Currently 75% of captains are married, and female participation in the labor force is at an all time high (OEMA, 1999). Besides an enhanced concern about family in general, the strong concern about the spouse may reflect that many leavers were married to women with college degrees. Some wives had advanced degrees. One captain pointed out that his wife, who had a degree in political science, was always able to get a job following a permanent change of station (PCS) move, but she always had to start again at the bottom of the career ladder.

A high OPTEMPO, of course, contributes to the number and length of family separations. Lengthy separations may adversely affect maternal and children's behavior (Kelley, 1994). Moreover, Castro and Adler (1999) point out that deployments differentially affect junior officer and enlisted soldiers more than more senior members. While they found that deployments were not necessarily a negative experience, soldiers intending to leave the military were more likely to report that the number of deployments negatively affected their marriage. For captains with a high concern for family welfare, this could pose a significant concern and affect career intent. Similarly, Rosen and Durand (1995), in a study of the role of family on retention of soldiers deployed during Operation Desert Storm, reported that deployment-related stress itself did not affect the retention of junior enlisted soldiers. However, if their spouses had unrealistic expectations of what the Army would do for them during the deployment, then deployment played a major factor in retention. This points to the role that attitude plays in interpreting the effects of family separation. Leavers may see deployments as a threat to the stability and well being of their family. Stayers and returners certainly do not like long separations from their family, but may view it as acceptable in the big picture of what is important in an Army career.

Job and career frustration was another class of factors affecting career intent. Job related stress, especially workload and time away from the family, is a key factor in producing stress in military personnel (GAO, 1999). Moreover, for many leavers there was a sense of disillusionment concerning their career experience and prospects in the Army. Officers are trained and socialized to have a warfighting focus, yet find themselves in an "Army spending much of its efforts on operations other than war and unsure of its focus" (OEMA, 1999). Officers see the peacekeeping mission as dominating for years to come, and foresee little satisfaction in manning checkpoints and controlling rival factions in countries far removed geographically and culturally from their own.

A related concern is a perception of micromanagement and lack of focus on training on the part of senior commanders. Interestingly, several officers specifically used the phrase "Power Point Army" to refer to their experiences. They reported

working long hours developing Power Point presentations for their commanders, rather than spending time in the field working with and training soldiers. Other job-related factors contributing to the decision to leave include lack of materials and the undermanning of units, a finding also reported by the GAO (1999).

The disillusionment leavers expressed about their jobs may relate to unrealistic expectations about what being an Army officer is like. As previously mentioned, prospective officers are trained with a warfighting mission in mind. Leadership is emphasized over management. Prospective officers are taught that leading and training troops is what officers do in the Army. After commissioning, Infantry officers take the Infantry Officer Basic Course (IOBC), in which they focus on warfighting and leadership skills. Their first assignment is most often as a rifle platoon leader, where they spend considerable time leading and training members of their platoon. Following their tour as a platoon leader, direct time with troops and training may be diminished. They typically will not be in command until they have been a captain for a year, or perhaps longer, when they are given a company command. Previous research has underscored the intense desire junior officers have to command (Matthews & Dyer, 1999). Following company command, and in some cases preceding it, are long years of staff duty. For officers highly motivated by working directly with soldiers in leadership and training, long periods of time away from this sort of work may be a major source of disillusionment.

Two specific areas of dissatisfaction differentiate leavers from stayers. Leavers found their jobs less meaningful and important than stayers and returners. In addition, they reported significantly less satisfaction with promotion opportunities. The former was probably related to their concern with the Army's current mission. The latter may reflect a different work value for many leavers. Leavers felt quite confident of eventual promotion to lieutenant colonel, but found this level of promotion insufficient given their education and training. Limited realistic potential for promotion beyond lieutenant colonel, long periods of time between promotions, and a promotion system that does not finely discriminate between different levels of performance contributed to their dissatisfaction in this area. Stayers and returners, on the other hand, were much more satisfied with their promotion chances and seemed satisfied about their chances for future advancement.

The perceived lure of a high-paying civilian job with less time away from the family appeals to some leavers. Greater opportunities for advancement, the long-term potential for significant income growth, and the chance to work in a field perceived to offer greater interest and meaning were what leavers were seeking in their post-Army jobs. Over 90% of leavers felt it would be relatively easy to find a job equal to or better than their current job. For the majority (71%) of leavers, however, the attraction of the civilian economy was not their primary reason for leaving, and civilian opportunities accounted for only 11% of the total number of primary and secondary reasons given for leaving. The robust civilian economy, therefore, may have been more of a moderating variable that affected the timing of a career move, rather than being the primary motivation for leaving.

A finding with important implications is that leavers typically think about separating for a lengthy period of time, frequently for more than a year. The decision to leave is not made hastily. Pros and cons of such a decision are carefully weighed. Once the decision to leave is reached, and the separation paperwork is submitted, little can be done to change their minds. Moreover, most leavers said they received very little meaningful mentoring early in their careers. Some were even hesitant to speak with their commanders concerning their thoughts of leaving. This suggests the need (1) for early, consistent, and genuine career mentoring, from the time of commissioning as a second lieutenant through promotion to captain; and (2) a need to train commanders at all levels to be more available and less judgmental in their interactions with junior officers. One stayer illustrated this point by saying that the single most important reason he stayed in the Army was the great leadership and mentoring he received from his first company commander when he was a rifle platoon leader. This stayer felt he owed it to future lieutenants to remain in the Army and be a company commander himself, so that he could, in turn, positively influence young officers.

Overall, only 20% of returners said they received meaningful mentoring early in their careers. Steinberg and Foley (1999) examined the extent and nature of mentoring in the Army, using both survey and interview procedures. Their research revealed three dimensions of mentoring in the Army: personal development, career sponsoring, and job coaching. Interestingly, nearly 75% of their sample of senior noncommissioned officers and officers reported being mentors, but less than 50% reported they were currently being mentored. Apparently, those who received job coaching but not personal development or career sponsoring were less likely to report they were being mentored. The interaction between effective mentoring and career-intent requires further analysis. However, this does suggest effective mentoring involves more than being taught how to "get ahead" in their profession. Junior officers must be successfully indoctrinated into the culture of the Army. Once internalized, the values representative of the Army culture may make officers less likely to leave.

There are indications that the quality of captains leaving the Army is good. The captains interviewed in the current study perceived the ones who are leaving to be of high quality. Many, including stayers and returners, felt the leavers were among the very best captains they knew. Data analyzed by OEMA (1999) suggest the quality of leavers and stayers is similar, but the retention of USMA graduates at the 11-year point in their career is at its lowest point since the class of 1950. Some of these losses are attributable to the post cold war drawdown, but more recent attrition is due to other factors. OEMA analyses further suggest that low quality officers leave early, as do captains who receive poor officer evaluation reports (OERs) during their company command.

In contrast, several leavers and stayers suggested that some captains electing to stay in the Army did so from a lack of initiative or confidence in their ability to thrive outside the Army. If less motivated or qualified captains indeed tend to remain in the Army, this could have serious implications on the quality of the future senior leadership.

This is an important observation with serious implications. Because of the subjective nature of the quality judgments made by the current sample, additional research should more systematically examine the quality of stayers. It would be inaccurate to conclude, based on the current methodology, that captains electing to remain in the Army represent a cohort of less able or less motivated leaders.

Importantly, captains who stay in the Army or return to active duty appear to be particularly motivated by the intrinsic characteristics of Army work and life. Intrinsic job motivation is characteristic of professional workers in general and intrinsic motivation is linked to desirable job behaviors (Weaver & Matthews, 1987). Identifying strategies to emphasize the intrinsic aspects of Army work and life could be beneficial in motivating some captains to remain in the Army. Mentoring is one way of achieving this end.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) predicts that returners would be highly satisfied with their decision to come back to active duty. Having made an important decision, it would be expected that returners would evaluate their Army job and life positively. Because the returners had been back on active duty for an average of only eight months, it is unknown how persistent positive attitudes toward the Army might be. None were USMA graduates. Further research focusing on the returner's commissioning sources, job specialties, and other key demographic factors should be done. This cohort of returning officers should be tracked through the remainder of their careers and retention and promotion rates noted. Returners are a promising pool from which to bolster the number of active duty captains, but an overall evaluation of the efficacy of the returning captain program is needed.

### *Recommendations*

The responses of the leavers, stayers, and returners point to the need for systematic long-term solutions to the captain shortage. Stop-gap measures such as accelerating the promotion of first lieutenants to captain and allowing previously separated captains to return to active duty may ameliorate the problem, but they fall short of addressing the fundamental causes of the captain shortage. The following are observations that address or suggest approaches to the more fundamental issues.

*Pay.* Adequate pay and benefits are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions to attract and retain junior officers. Pay and benefits were seldom mentioned as primary reasons for leaving or staying in the Army. Instead, intrinsic qualities of the profession of the Army officer are important in keeping officers in the Army. Stayers and returners were more likely than leavers to value "important and meaningful work," a finding that characterizes professional workers in the civilian sector (Weaver & Matthews, 1988). The finding that only 29% of leavers felt "pulled" out of the Army by civilian opportunities supports this contention. Thus, keeping pay competitive with the civilian sector is important, but structuring the work environment and leadership to maximize the intrinsic qualities of military service is fundamental to improving captain retention.

*Source of Commissioning.* A disproportionate percentage of leavers (70%) were USMA graduates, compared to only 13% of the stayers and 0% of returners. The methodological restrictions of the current study make it impossible to conclude whether this finding is representative of all captains leaving the Army. However, data show that approximately 59% of USMA graduates remain on active duty at six years of service, and this number drops to 33% at 11 years of service (OEMA, 1999). Both of these figures are among the lowest observed in the past 50 years. Additional research is needed to specify why USMA graduates are leaving the Army at this rate and if this rate is disproportionately high. Certainly, the value of a West Point education is highly valued in the civilian economy, and may contribute to Academy graduates leaving the Army and being less likely to return to active duty, even if given an opportunity to do so. Whatever the reasons, one approach to dealing with captain attrition over the long term is to develop innovative ways of retaining these officers.

*Mentoring.* Few of the officers interviewed felt they had received meaningful mentoring early in their careers. As a whole they felt that genuine career mentoring, especially on the part of their first company and battalion commanders, would have helped them adjust to the realities of Army life. The counseling now required on the part of battalion and brigade commanders when a captain has initiated the paperwork to separate from the Army is regarded by these officers as too little and too late. This perfunctory counseling seems to have little effect in changing a captain's mind about separating. In contrast, efforts to institutionalize early and meaningful career mentoring appear to be one way of helping junior officers maintain the "big picture."

*Job assignment policies.* By far the most frequently mentioned factor in producing job/career dissatisfaction and frustration was the perception of an inflexible job assignment system. The captains understood that the needs of the Army must be met and that sometimes these needs must override personal preferences. However, most contended that there was room for more flexibility and control in the job assignment process. Increasing the perceived degree of control that a junior officer has over his or her career may have a tremendous impact on that officer's overall evaluation of Army life.

*Family issues.* Leavers felt that the civilian sector was more optimal for family life than the Army. This was based on the assumption that they would be less vulnerable to frequent relocations, less travel, and more control over their work schedule compared to their Army career. The returners had a different interpretation. While they may have shared the leaver's beliefs about OPTEMPO in civilian jobs, they reported that the reality of the civilian jobs they assumed was different from their expectations. They worked more hours, had less autonomy, and were often more subject to relocations than they had anticipated. Even where they had a more stable work schedule, they missed the 30 days paid vacation, federal holidays, training holidays, and reduced holiday work schedules they experienced in the Army. This suggests that the Army needs to do a better job of selling its family-related benefits, and contrasting them more realistically with similar benefits likely to be encountered in the civilian sector. These

captains took these benefits for granted, and were surprised and dismayed not to have them in their civilian jobs.

*Civilian Opportunities.* In a robust and booming civilian economy it would be disingenuous for the Army to deny the existence of good opportunities outside the Army. It is important, however, that officers considering leaving the Army be given a realistic appraisal of what pay, benefits, work schedules, and organizational climate (as contrasted with the Army) may await them. They should consider the claims of civilian job recruiters with a degree of caution. This too may be an area that can be addressed through career mentoring.

### *Conclusions*

The strength of the current project was its focus on captains who had made important career decisions to leave, stay, or return to the Army. The responses corroborated, for the most part, results of large-scale surveys of officer attitudes that are regularly conducted. The career decisions of junior officers are carefully considered and are affected by a number of complex and interacting factors. A key implication is that it is inaccurate to base strategies to improve captain retention on a single factor.

Some methodological limitations may restrict the generalization of the results. The sample size was relatively small and included, for the most part, captains assigned to a single Army post. A larger sample would increase confidence in the reliability of the results obtained. In addition, the sample was not random. It was heavily weighed toward Infantry officers and others in combat arms jobs. Despite these limitations, comparisons to existing survey data suggested the officers included in the current project were similar to Army captains as a whole in career attitudes and intentions.

Addressing the captain shortage is critical because captains constitute the future leadership of the Army. There is no quick fix to address captain losses. The civilian economy is strong and gives every indication of remaining so. Keeping military pay competitive to the civilian sector is vital, but is only one step toward increasing the retention rate of captains. It is imperative that the Army address factors that affect the job satisfaction of its junior officers. In particular, it must emphasize the intrinsic aspects of Army work and life that make an Army career special. Job dissatisfaction leads officers to consider alternative careers, but the unique qualities and challenges of Army work and life can also function to retain officers.

Another factor that should be addressed is the role of the family in captain retention. Junior officers are at the point in their lives where they are getting married, having children, or thinking about doing so. Frequent separations due to deployments, long working hours, and working on weekends take time away from the family. The Army has historically done a good job of emphasizing the role of family, but increased OPTEMPO associated with the force drawdown and increased frequency of deployments has placed new stresses on the family support structure. In addition, stressing the positive features of the Army work-family relationship is needed. Few

civilian occupations offer 30 days of paid leave, holidays, and health benefits the Army does. These positives must be viewed weighed against the negatives resulting from high OPTEMPO and also versus what benefits are likely to be found in a civilian occupation.

Perhaps the strongest factor affecting the decision to leave the Army is high OPTEMPO. This, in turn, is strongly related to the increased number of deployments the Army must respond to combined with the downsizing of the Army. High OPTEMPO affects job satisfaction because officers (and their enlisted counterparts) must work long hours, have less time for training and for building and nurturing effective relationships with superiors, colleagues, and subordinates. With fewer personnel available, remaining troops must spend more time deployed away from their families. A solution to high OPTEMPO is not easy. Fewer deployments or an increase in Army personnel require high level political approval.

The current project was unique in including returners in its sample. Returners have the rare perspective of being able to compare military and civilian occupational experiences. Although the sample of returners was small, and biased in the sense that returners represent only a select subset of the population of former captains, sharing their experiences with active duty officers might help officers considering leaving the Army to consider the realities of civilian jobs. The Army may consider continuing programs that allow former officers to return easily to active duty. The ones who accept such an offer appear to be highly motivated and eager to serve, although further research is necessary to conclusively establish their performance over the long term.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Instruments

Leaver Interview Form .....	A-2
Stayer Interview Form .....	A-6
Returner Interview Form.....	A-9

Captains Attrition Study  
Interview Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Unit: \_\_\_\_\_ Job \_\_\_\_\_  
 Branch: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Commissioning: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prior Service Yes/No If Yes, length of prior service \_\_\_\_\_  
 Are you Branch Qualified? Yes No  
 Commissioning Source: USMA ROTC OCS OTHER \_\_\_\_\_  
 Introduction

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm from the U.S. Army Research Institute. We are conducting research on officer careers and the different reasons that people choose to stay in or leave the Army. We are currently contacting people who have made the decision to leave the Army, and have several questions we would like to ask you about your Army career decisions. The responses you give are for research purposes only and the responses of individual officers will not be revealed to anyone other than the researchers.

1. Prior to commissioning, how long did you plan to stay in the Army? (WHY?)
2. Why did you decide to leave the Army?
3. Did anything else influence your decision to leave?
4. When did you start thinking about leaving? (Why?)
5. When did you make your final decision to leave? (Why?)
6. If you had not chosen to leave the Army at this time, do you think that you would have been allowed to stay in the Army until retirement? (Why/why not?)
  - a. definitely yes
  - b. probably yes
  - c. not sure
  - d. probably no
  - e. definitely no

Why/why not:

7. Do you already have a civilian job waiting for you? If yes, what kind of job is it?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. definitely yes
  - b. probably yes
  - c. not sure
  - d. probably no

- e. definitely no

What is it?

8. If you do not have a civilian job waiting for you, do you think it will be easy to find a civilian job equal to or better than your Army job?

- a. definitely yes
- b. probably yes
- c. not sure
- d. probably no
- e. definitely no

9. I am going to hand you a card with five characteristics that a person may seek in a job. Please indicate which is the MOST important to you. Then indicate which is SECOND in importance to you, and so on to the LEAST important factor.

- a. high pay
- b. work that is important and meaningful
- c. flexible working hours
- d. chances for advancement
- e. job security

(INTERVIEWER – clearly record rank-ordered responses)

10. Rate how satisfied you are with each of the following factors in your Army job.

(INTERVIEWER – CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT IS GIVEN)

- a. Pay and compensation:
  - very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - satisfied
  - very satisfied
- b. Work that is important and meaningful
  - very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - satisfied
  - very satisfied
- c. Flexible working hours
  - very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied

- satisfied
- very satisfied

d. Chances for advancement

- very dissatisfied
- dissatisfied
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- satisfied
- very satisfied

e. Job security

- very dissatisfied
- dissatisfied
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- satisfied
- very satisfied

11. Are you married? Yes            No

IF MARRIED ASK

Is your spouse in the military? Yes No

(INTERVIEWER – ASK ABOUT CHILDREN REGARDLESS OF MARITAL STATUS)

Do you have any children? Yes No If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Has conflict between your family and your career influenced you decision to leave?

13. Is there any factor(s) about your current job or your experiences at Fort Benning which you have not mentioned previously that have influenced your decision to leave?

14. What could the Army have done to convince you to stay?

(When you were making your decision to leave, did any senior officer give you advice or "mentoring?" After making the decision, did any senior officer ask you to stay or try to convince you to stay in?)

15. Leavers only) Is your decision to leave more "push" (due to dissatisfaction with job, the Army, optempo, etc.) or "Pull" (perception of better deal outside of Army).

16. Is there anyone else in your immediate family (parents/siblings) who are/were in the military? (Note if they were career or not).

17. What is the quality of captains who are leaving the Army?

18. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

Captains Attrition Study  
Interview Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Unit: \_\_\_\_\_  
Branch: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Commissioning: \_\_\_\_\_  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Rank: \_\_\_\_\_  
Prior Service Yes/No If Yes, length of prior service \_\_\_\_\_  
Are you Branch Qualified? Yes No  
Commissioning Source: USMA ROTC OCS OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm from the U.S. Army Research Institute. We are conducting research on officer careers and the different reasons that people choose to stay in or leave the Army. We have several questions we would like to ask you about your Army career decisions. The responses you give are for research purposes only and the responses of individual officers will not be revealed to anyone other than the researchers.

1. Prior to commissioning, how long did you plan to stay in the Army? WHY
2. Do you currently plan to make the Army a career, and to remain in the Army until retirement?
  - a. definitely yes
  - b. probably yes
  - c. not sure
  - d. probably no
  - e. definitely no
3. What makes you consider staying in the Army? (Probe for multiple influences)
4. What makes you consider leaving the Army (Probe multiple influences)
5. Do you think that you will be allowed to stay in the Army until retirement, if you choose to do so? (Why/why not?)
  - a. definitely yes
  - b. probably yes
  - c. not sure
  - d. probably no
  - e. definitely no

Why/why not:

6. Do you think you could easily find a civilian job equal to or better than your Army job?
  - a. definitely yes
  - b. probably yes
  - c. not sure
  - d. probably no
  - e. definitely no
  
7. I am going to hand you a card with five characteristics that a person may seek in a job. Please indicate which is the MOST important to you. Then indicate which is SECOND in importance to you, and so on to the LEAST important factor.
  - a. high pay
  - b. work that is important and meaningful
  - c. flexible working hours
  - d. chances for advancement
  - e. job security

INTERVIEWER – CLEARLY RECORD RANK ORDERED RESPONSES

8. Rate how satisfied you are with each of the following factors in your Army job.  
(INTERVIEWER – CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT IS GIVEN)

- a. Pay and compensation:
  - very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - satisfied
  - very satisfied
  
- b. Work that is important and meaningful
  - very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - satisfied
  - very satisfied
  
- c. Flexible working hours
  - very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - satisfied
  - very satisfied

- d. Chances for advancement
- very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - satisfied
  - very satisfied

- e. Job security
- very dissatisfied
  - dissatisfied
  - neither satisfied or dissatisfied
  - satisfied
  - very satisfied

9. Are you married: Yes No

IF MARRIED ASK:

Is your spouse in the military? Yes No

INTERVIEWER - ASK ABOUT CHILDREN, REGARDLESS OF MARITAL STATUS

Do you have any children? Yes No If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Is conflict between your family and your Army career a factor that influences/may influence your decision to stay in the Army?
11. Is there any factor about your current job or your experiences at Fort Benning which you have not mentioned previously that are influencing your career intent?
12. What could the Army do to convince you to stay or to make you more likely to stay?
13. Is there anyone else in your immediate family (parents/siblings) who are/were in the military? (Note if they were career or not).
14. What is the quality of captains who are getting out?
15. Are there any other comments you would like to make concerning factors that may affect your decision to make the Army a career?

## RETURNING Captain FORM

### Captains Attrition Study Interview Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Unit: \_\_\_\_\_ Post \_\_\_\_\_  
Branch: \_\_\_\_\_ Current Job \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Commissioning: \_\_\_\_\_ Month/Year separated \_\_\_\_  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Month/Yr return \_\_\_\_  
Prior Service Yes/No If Yes, length of prior service \_\_\_\_\_  
Are you Branch Qualified? Yes No  
Commissioning Source: USMA ROTC OCS OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

#### Introduction

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm from the U.S. Army Research Institute. We are conducting research on officer careers and the different reasons that people choose to stay in or leave the Army. We have several questions we would like to ask you about your Army career decisions. The responses you give are for research purposes only and the responses of individual officers will not be revealed to anyone other than the researchers.

1. Prior to commissioning, how long did you plan to stay in the Army? WHY
2. Do you currently plan to make the Army a career, and to remain in the Army until retirement?
  - a. definitely yes
  - b. probably yes
  - c. not sure
  - d. probably no
  - e. definitely no
3. What made you leave the Army? (Probe for multiple influences)
4. What civilian job(s) did you hold? Were your expectations met? Probe for job satisfaction, etc.
5. What made you decide to come back into the Army (Probe multiple influences)?
6. Do you think that you will be allowed to stay in the Army until retirement, if you choose to do so? (Why/why not?)
  - a. definitely yes
  - b. probably yes

- c. not sure
- d. probably no
- e. definitely no

Why/why not:

7. Were you able to easily find a civilian job equal to or better than your Army job?

- a. definitely yes
- b. probably yes
- c. not sure
- d. probably no
- e. definitely no

8. Could you do so now?

- a. definitely yes
- b. probably yes
- c. not sure
- d. probably no
- e. definitely yes

9. I am going to hand you a card with five characteristics that a person may seek in a job. Please indicate which is the MOST important to you. Then indicate which is SECOND in importance to you, and so on to the LEAST important factor.

- a. high pay
- b. work that is important and meaningful
- c. flexible working hours
- d. chances for advancement
- e. job security

INTERVIEWER – CLEARLY RECORD RANK ORDERED RESPONSES

10. Rate how satisfied you are with each of the following factors in your Army career.  
(INTERVIEWER – CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT IS GIVEN)

a. Pay and compensation:

- very dissatisfied
- dissatisfied
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- satisfied
- very satisfied

b. Work that is important and meaningful

- very dissatisfied
- dissatisfied
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- satisfied
- very satisfied

c. Flexible working hours

- very dissatisfied
- dissatisfied
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- satisfied
- very satisfied

d. Chances for advancement

- very dissatisfied
- dissatisfied
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- satisfied
- very satisfied

e. Job security

- very dissatisfied
- dissatisfied
- neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- satisfied
- very satisfied

11. Are you married: Yes No

IF MARRIED ASK:

Is your spouse in the military? Yes No

What is her/his level of education? \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER - ASK ABOUT CHILDREN, REGARDLESS OF MARITAL STATUS

Do you have any children? Yes No If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Did family issues (high OPTEMPO, time away from family, etc.) influence your original decision to leave the Army?

Does it play an influence now?

13. Is there any factor about your current job or your experiences at your current post which you have not mentioned previously that are influencing your career intent?
14. What could the Army do to improve captain retention?
15. Is there anyone else in your immediate family (parents/siblings) who are/were in the military? (Note if they were career or not).
16. What, in your opinion, is the quality of captains that are leaving the Army?
17. Did you receive meaningful career mentoring early in your career, i.e., as a second lieutenant?
18. Did you seek or were you given meaningful advice or mentoring when you made your original decision to leave the Army?
19. Are there any other comments you would like to make concerning factors that may affect your decision to make the Army a career?

## Appendix B

### Leaver's Individual Reasons for Leaving

### Leavers

Reasons For Leaving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<i>Army Job/Career Related</i>																	
excessive micromanagement		x						x	x	x	x	x					
high OPTEMPO	x	x			x		x	x			x	x	x	x		x	
lack of control in assignments			x				x			x	x	x			x		
insufficient training support											x			x			
poor enlisted pay/benefits								x									
poor leadership		x	x						x	x				x	x	x	
dislike peacekeeping mission														x			
dislike current job	x	x								x		x					
current job not challenging		x					x		x								
poor command climate					x										x		
future assignments undesirable								x		x							x
limited/slow promotion chances									x	x	x			x		x	x
pay too low										x							
lack of personal freedom										x							
poor retirement benefits									x								
<i>Family Issues</i>																	
family and Army incompatible	x										x	x					
time away from family	x		x				x	x					x	x		x	
moving/relocating disruptive														x	x		x
wife's career important							x			x	x				x		
Army not a place to raise child												x	x				
poor dependent health care																x	
<i>Civilian Opportunities</i>																	
want to pursue new career		x		x	x	x							x				x
see good civilian opportunities			x						x		x						
higher civilian quality of life																x	